JOHN GAY.

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THE

LIFE

OF

JOHN GAY.

By WILLIAM COXE,

RECTOR OF BEMERTON.

SECOND EDITION.

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11 46 3
607

CONTENTS.

Advertiſement.
Dedication.

LIFE OF GAY.

CHAPTER THE FIRST.

Family, birth, and education of Gay.—Bound apprentice to a mercer.—Quits that employment, and devotes himſelf to the Muſes.—Publiſhes his Rural Sports.—Commences an acquaintance with Pope and Swift.—His indigence.—Is appointed Secretary to the Ducheſs of Monmouth.—Publiſhes Trivia and The Fan, and his Shepherd's Week, which he dedicates to Lord Bolingbroke.—Quits the Ducheſs of Monmouth's ſervice.—Appointed Secretary to the Earl of Clarendon, on his embaſſy to Hanover.—Returns to England in great poverty.—His Epiſtle to the Princeſs of Wales.—Commences Courtier; his hopes and diſappointments.—Obtains a conſiderable ſum by a ſubſcription to his Poems.—Loſes his money in the South-Sea ſcheme.—Appointed a Commiſſioner

PAGE

in the Lottery.—Turned out again.—Diſappointed in his expectations on the acceſſion of George the Second.—Rejects the offer of being Gentleman Uſher to Princeſs Louiſa.—His chagrin and illneſs at this diſappointment. - - - - - - - - 1

CHAPTER THE SECOND.

Succeſs of the Beggar's Opera.—Remarks on that performance.—Gay prepares a ſecond part, called Polly, for the ſtage, but is prevented from bringing it on by the Lord Chamberlain.—His fortune promoted by that event.—Obtains large ſubſcriptions.—Acquires the protection and friendſhip of the Duke and Ducheſs of Queenſberry.—His fortune increaſes.—His reſolutions and plans of œconomy.—His ſudden illneſs and death.—Regret of his friends. - - - - - - - - - - - - - 31

CHAPTER THE THIRD.

Social Character, Perſon, and Manners of Gay.—Remarks on his Poetical Character—and particularly as a Writer of Fables.—His eminent merit in that line. - - - - - - - - - - - 55

Original Dedication of the Author.

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LIFE
OF
JOHN GAY.*

CHAPTER THE FIRST.

FAMILY, birth, and education of Gay.—Bound apprentice to a mercer.—Quits that employment, and devotes himſelf to the Muſes.—Publiſhes his Rural Sports.—Commences an acquaintance with Pope and Swift.—His indigence.—Is appointed

* The materials of this biographical ſketch are principally taken from the Lives of Gay, in the *General Dictionary*, in the fourth volume of Cibber's *Lives of the Poets*, in the ſecond volume of the *Hiſtorical Account of Dramatic Writers*, in the *Biographia Britannica*, from his *Life by Johnſon*, from his own Works, and from the Correſpondence between Gay, Swift, and Pope. In order to prevent frequent interruptions in the body of the Text, I have not in every extract referred to his own Works and to the volumes of Swift and Pope, becauſe the Paſſages quoted may be eaſily found in the Poems from which they are ſelected; and the letters may be traced, according to the order of their dates, in the fifth and ſixth volumes of Warburton's edition of Pope; and in the ſix volumes of Swift's Letters, publiſhed by Hawkeſworth.

Secretary to the Ducheſs of Monmouth.—Publiſhes Trivia and The Fan, and his Shepherd's Week, which he dedicates to Lord Bolingbroke.—Quits the Ducheſs of Monmouth's ſervice.—Appointed Secretary to the Earl of Clarendon, on his embaſſy to Hanover.—Returns to England in great poverty.—His Epiſtle to the Princeſs of Wales.—Commences Courtier; his hopes and diſappointments.—Obtains a conſiderable ſum by a ſubſcription to his Poems.—Loſes his money in the South-Sea ſcheme.—Appointed a Commiſſioner in the Lottery.—Turned out again.—Diſappointed in his expectations on the acceſſion of George the Second.—Rejects the offer of being Gentleman Uſher to Princeſs Louiſa.—His chagrin and illneſs at this diſappointment.

JOHN GAY, the author of theſe delightful Fables, was deſcended from a poor but ancient family in Devonſhire. To the indigent ſtate of his immediate anceſtors, he alludes in his Rural Sports:

"But I who ne'er was bleſt by fortune's hand,
Nor brighten'd ploughſhares in paternal land."

He was born in 1688, at or near Barnſtaple,* and brought up at the free ſchool of that town, under

* Some of his biographers aſſert that Gay was born at Exeter,

under William Rayner,* who had been educated at Weſtminſter ſchool, and who publiſhed a volume of Latin and Engliſh verſes. Upon leaving ſchool, Gay was bound apprentice to a mercer, but, as his biographer Jacob obſerves, "having a genius for high excellencies, he conſidered ſuch employment as a degradation, and relinquiſhed that occupation to reap the laurels of poetry."

Emancipated from a ſituation not congenial to his temper, he indulged himſelf freely in the courſe of life, to which his genius and ſtudies inclined. Poetry became at once his delight and his employment. Being introduced to Swift and Pope, he improved his talents in their ſociety, and rendered himſelf highly agreeable to them from the livelineſs of his diſpoſi-

ter, and his own lines in his Epiſtle to the Earl of Burlington, ſeem to confirm their opinion:

"But now the driving gales ſuſpend the rain,
We mount our ſteeds, and *Devon's city* gain.
Hail! happy *native* land—but I forbear,
What other counties muſt with envy hear."

But the author of Gay's Life, in the General Dictionary, has the authority of Pope, to whom the Life was ſubmitted, for ſaying that he was born at or near Barnſtaple.

* Johnſon, in contradiction to the earlieſt biographer of Gay, and to the authority of Pope, ſays that his maſter's name was Luck.

tion, the ſportive playfulneſs of his temper, and the ſimplicity of his character. The *Rural Sports*, or *Georgics*, which he publiſhed in 1711, were inſcribed to Pope, who was then riſing in reputation. Although there is not in this Poem, either much invention or imagery, although the lines are in ſome places too proſaic, and the rhymes not always as ſtrictly pure as thoſe in his later works; yet, if we conſider his age, which was only two and twenty, we muſt allow that it has great merit.

It contains one humane paſſage which announces a feeling mind. Speaking of fiſhing, he reprobates the cruel method too commonly uſed of angling with worms:

"Around the ſteel no tortur'd worm ſhall twine
No blood of living inſect ſtain my line:
Let me, leſs cruel, caſt the feather'd hook,
With pliant rod athwart the pebled brook;
Silent along the mazy margin ſtray,
And with the fur-wrought fly delude the prey."

As this Poem is the firſt, ſo it is, except the Fables, the moſt moral of all his works; and while I pay this tribute of approbation, I cannot but regret that an author who poſſeſſed ſuch great abilities, and conſequently ſuch a power of doing good, did not uniformly promote the cauſe

cauſe of virtue; for the warmeſt admirers of Gay muſt confeſs, that in general he cannot be eſteemed a moral writer; and that ſome of his works may juſtly be cenſured for licentiouſneſs.

It is with pleaſure that I quote from Rural Sports his ſublime addreſs to Providence:

"Sweet contemplation elevates my ſenſe,
While I ſurvey the works of Providence.
O could the muſe in loftier ſtrains rehearſe
The glorious Author of the univerſe,
Who reins the winds, gives the vaſt ocean bounds,
And circumſcribes the floating worlds their rounds;
My ſoul ſhould over-flow in ſongs of praiſe,
And my Creator's name inſpire my lays!"

The portrait of the Happy Village Maid, and the concluding lines regretting a country life, are replete with feeling:

"What happineſs the Rural Maid attends,
In chearful labour while each day ſhe ſpends;
She gratefully receives what heaven has ſent,
And, rich in poverty, enjoys content.
If love's ſoft paſſion in her boſom reign,
An equal paſſion warms her happy ſwain;
No homebred jars her quiet ſtate controul,
Nor watchful jealouſies torment her ſoul;
With ſecret joy ſhe ſees her little race
Hang on her breaſt, and her ſmall cottage grace;

The fleecy ball their buſy fingers cull,
Or from the ſpindle draw the lengthening wool.
Thus flow her hours with conſtant peace of mind,
Till age the lateſt thread of life unwind.
Ye happy fields, unknown to noiſe and ſtrife,
The kind rewarders of induſtrious life;
Ye ſhady woods, where once I us'd to rove,
Alike indulgent to the muſe and love;
Ye murmuring ſtreams that in meanders roll,
The ſweet compoſers of the penſive ſoul;
Farewell! The city calls me from your bow'rs:
Farewell, amuſing thoughts and peaceful hours."

Pope was pleaſed with the dedication; and on farther acquaintance with Gay, found ſuch attractions in his manners and converſation, that he ſeems to have received him into his utmoſt confidence; and a friendſhip was formed between them which laſted till their ſeparation by death, without any known abatement on either ſide.

In this period of life Gay was very indigent, and was ſo extremely careleſs and improvident, that whenever he obtained a ſum of money by his writings, he diſſipated it without the leaſt conſideration. To this extreme facility and indifference about the morrow, Swift alludes in a letter to Pope. "I ſuppoſe Mr. Gay will return from Bath with twenty pounds more

fleſh, and two hundred leſs in money. Providence never deſigned him to be above two and twenty, by his thoughtleſſneſs and cullibility. He has as little foreſight of age, ſickneſs, poverty, or loſs of admirers, as a girl of fifteen, &c. But God bleſs you, whoſe great genius has not ſo tranſported you as to leave you to the courteſy of mankind; for wealth is liberty, and liberty is a bleſſing fitteſt for a philoſopher; and Gay is a ſlave juſt by two thouſand pounds too little.—*July* 16, 1726.

In 1712, he was relieved from his embarraſſed ſituation, by being appointed Secretary to the Ducheſs of Monmouth,* with a handſome ſalary. During his reſidence in her family, he publiſhed *Trivia, or the Art of Walking in the Streets of London*, in three books, in which he acknowleges to have received ſeveral hints from Swift. Trivia, as Johnſon remarks, is ſprightly, various, and pleaſant; the ſubject is of that kind which Gay was by nature qualified to adorn, yet ſome of the decorations are far fetched and unnatural. According to the obſervation of a judicious critic, "Trivia abounds, alſo, with many ſtrokes of genuine humour and pictures of London-life, which are now become curious, becauſe our

* Lady Mary Scot, daughter and heireſs of the Duke of Buccleugh, widow of the unfortunate Duke of Monmouth, natural ſon of Charles the ſecond, who was beheaded in the reign of James the ſecond.

manners, as well as our dreſſes, have been ſo much altered within a few years."*

One of the beſt productions of Gay, owed its origin to a peculiar circumſtance, thus related by Johnſon: "Next year, 1713, he publiſhed *The Shepherd's Week*, ſix Engliſh Paſtorals, in which the images are from real life, ſuch as appears among the ruſticks in parts of England, remote from London. Steele, in ſome papers of the Guardian, had praiſed Ambroſe Philips, as the paſtoral writer that yielded only to Theocritus, Virgil, and Spencer. Pope who had alſo publiſhed Paſtorals, not pleaſed to be over looked, drew up a compariſon of his own compoſitions with thoſe of Philips, in which he covertly gave himſelf the preference, while he ſeemed to diſown it. Not content with this, he is ſuppoſed to have incited Gay to write the Shepherd's Week, to ſhew, that if it be neceſſary for Shepherds to copy nature with minuteneſs, rural life muſt be exhibited ſuch as groſſneſs and ignorance have made it."

"But the effect of reality and truth became conſpicuous, even when the intention was to ſhew them groveling and degraded. Theſe Paſ-

* Eſſay on the Genius and Writings of Pope, vol. 2, p. 251.

torals

torals became popular, and were read with delight, as repreſentations of rural manners and occupations, by thoſe who had no intereſt in the rivalry of the poets, nor knowledge of the critical diſpute."

In this year, or in the beginning of 1713, Gay probably publiſhed *The Fan*, a Poem in three books; for Pope, in a letter, dated Auguſt 23, 1713, ſays, "I am very much recreated and refreſhed with the news of the advancement of *The Fan*, which I doubt not will delight the eye and ſenſe of the fair, ſo long as that agreeable machine ſhall play in the hands of poſterity. I am glad your Fan is mounted ſo ſoon, but I would have you varniſh and glaze it at your leiſure, and poliſh the ſticks as much as you can. You may then cauſe it to be borne in the hands of both ſexes, no leſs in England than in China, where it is ordinary for a Mandarine to fan himſelf cool after a debate, and a ſtateſman to hide his face with it while he tells a grave lie."

Gay did not long agree with the Ducheſs of Monmouth. In a letter to Swift, he ſays, "I am quite off with the Ducheſs of Monmouth," and Arbuthnot writes to Swift, "The Ducheſs has turned him off, which I am afraid will make the poor man's condition worſe inſtead of better." *June* 8 1714.

But he was amply recompenced for the loſs of this domeſtic ſituation by the notice of Oxford and Bolingbroke, thoſe great patrons of letters, who, at the recommendation of Swift and Arbuthnot, diſtinguiſhed him with many marks of regard. Having ſhewn his Paſtorals in manuſcript to Lord Bolingbroke, he was deſired to print them, as he himſelf has recorded in the dedication:

" Lo I, who erſt beneath a tree
Sung Bumkinet and Bowzybee,
And Blouzelind and Marian hight,
In apron blue or apron white,
Now write my ſonnets in a book,
For my good Lord of Bolingbroke, &c.
With whoſe fair name I'll deck my ſtrain;
St. John right courteous to the ſwain.
For thus he told me on a day,
Trim are thy Sonnets, gentle Gay!
And, certes, mirth it were to ſee
Thy joyous madrigals twice three,
With preface meet and notes profound,
Imprinted fair, and well ybound.
All ſuddenly then home I ſped,
And did ev'n as my Lord had ſaid.

Lo here thou haſt mine Eclogues fair,
But let not theſe detain thine ear;
Let not th' affairs of ſtates and kings
Wait while our Bowzybeus ſings.
Rather than verſe of ſimple ſwain
Shou'd ſtay the trade of France or Spain,

Or

Or for the plaint of parſon's maid,
Yon' Emp'ror's packets be delay'd,
In ſooth I ſwear by holy Paul,
I'd burn book, preface, notes and all."

The Miniſters did not ſolely feed him with promiſes, for he obtained the place of Secretary to the Earl of Clarendon, who was appointed Envoy-plenipotentiary to the court of Hanover.

Gay was ſo extremely poor that he could not ſupply himſelf with the neceſſaries requiſite for his ſituation. In this dilemma he ſent a humourous petition to Lord Oxford, of which he gives an account in a letter to Swift. Dated London, *June* 8, 1714:

"I am every day attending my Lord Treaſurer for his bounty, in order to ſet me out; which he hath promiſed me upon the following petition, which I ſent him by Dr. Arbuthnot."

The Epigrammatical Petition of

JOHN GAY.

"I'm no more to converſe with the ſwains,
But go where fine people reſort:
One can live without money on plains,
But never without it at court.

If, when with the ſwains I did gambol,
I array'd me in ſilver aud blue;
When abroad, and in courts I ſhall ramble,
Pray my lord, how much money will do?"

Arbuthnot alſo thus expreſſes himſelf in a letter to Swift on the ſame ſubject:

"You know that Gay goes to Hanover, and my Lord Treaſurer has promiſed to equip him. Monday is the day of departure; and he is now dancing attendance for money to buy him ſhoes, ſtockings, and linen."

In conſequence of this petition, Gay received 100l. from the treaſury, with which Arbuthnot ſays he went away a happy man.

At Hanover he was noticed by the Electoral Princeſs, afterwards Queen Caroline, who aſked for a copy of his Poems which had been lately publiſhed, and on which Arbuthnot remarks, "Is he not a true Poet, who had not one of his books to give to the Princeſs, who aſked for one?"

Gay ſeemed now to enjoy a bright proſpect; he mentions in a letter to Arbuthnot that Lord Clarendon was very much approved of at court, and

and was not diſſatisfied with his reception: but when he wrote this letter, the hopes of Clarendon and his Secretary were already blaſted by the death of Queen Anne. The Embaſſy of Clarendon laſted only fifteeen days; being a Tory, he was recalled in diſgrace, and Gay returned to England in a worſe condition than when he left it.

Pope welcomed Gay on his return to England, with all the warmth of true friendſhip:

September 23, 1714.

"Welcome to your native ſoil. Welcome to your friends. Thrice welcome to me. Whether returned bleſt with court-intereſt, the love and familiarity of the great, and filled with agreeable hopes; or melancholy with dejection, contemplative of the changes of fortune, and doubtful for the future. Whether returned a triumphant Whig or a deſponding Tory; equally all hail! equally beloved and welcome to me. If happy, I am to partake of your elevation; if unhappy, you have ſtill a warm corner in my heart, and a retreat at Binfield in the worſt of times at your ſervice. If you are a Tory, or thought ſo by any man, I know it can proceed from nothing but your gratitude to a few people, who endeavoured to ſerve you, and whoſe politics were never

ver your concern. If you are a Whig, as I rather hope, and as I think, your principles and mine (as brother poets) had ever a bias to the ſide of liberty. I know you are an honeſt man, and an inoffenſive one. Upon the whole I know you are incapable of being ſo much of either party as to be good for nothing. Therefore once more, whatever you are, or in whatever ſtate you are, all hail."

Gay was now reduced to great diſtreſs of circumſtances. "Poor Gay," Arbuthnot obſerves in a letter to Swift, dated October 19, 1714, "is much where he was, only out of the Dutcheſs of Monmouth's family and ſervice. He has ſome confidence in the Princeſs, and Counteſs of Pickburgh; I wiſh it may be ſignificant to him. I adviſed him to make a Poem upon the Princeſs before ſhe came over, deſcribing her to the Engliſh ladies, for it ſeems the Princeſs does not diſlike that. She is really a perſon, that I believe will give great content to every body. But Gay was in ſuch a groveling condition as to the affairs of the world, that his Muſe would not ſtoop to viſit him."

This deſpondency however did not continue long; he adopted the hint ſuggeſted by Arbuthnot, and wrote an *Epiſtle to a Lady, occaſioned by the*

the arrival of her Royal Highneſs the Princeſs of Wales. After drawing a highly coloured portrait of the Princeſs, he artfully alludes to his own diſappointment and to his hopes of promotion by her patronage:

Since all my ſchemes were baulk'd (my laſt reſort)
I left the muſes to frequent the court:
Penſive each night from room to room I walk'd,
To one I bow'd, and to another talk'd;
Inquir'd what news, or ſuch a lady's name,
And did the next day, and the next, the ſame.
Places I found, were daily given away,
And yet no friendly Gazette mention'd Gay.
I aſk'd a friend what method to purſue;
He cry'd I want a place as well as well as you.
Another aſk'd me, why I had not writ;
A poet owes his fortune to his wit:
Strait I reply'd, with what a courtly grace
Flows eaſy verſe from him that has a place?
Had Virgil ne'er at court improv'd his ſtrains,
He ſtill had ſung of flocks and homely ſwains;
And had not Horace ſweet preferment found,
The Roman lyre had never learn'd to ſound.

After paying a high tribute of applauſe to the Princeſs for having refuſed to marry the Arch-Duke Charles, afterwards Emperor,

" The pomp of titles eaſy faith might ſhake,
She ſcorn'd an empire for religion's ſake:

For

For this on earth the Britiſh crown was giv'n,
And an immortal crown decreed in heav'n."

He thus concludes:

"Here paus'd the ſullen muſe; in haſte I dreſs'd
And through the crowd of needy courtiers preſs'd,
Though unſucceſsful, happy whilſt I ſee
Thoſe eyes, that glad a nation, ſhine on me."

In fact this Epiſtle was a poetical addreſs for a place, and his petition ſeems not to have paſſed unnoticed. Gay now commenced courtier, and paid regular attendance in hopes of preferment. Being much noticed by the Prince and Princeſs of Wales, he expected great favours, and was continually diſappointed; a circumſtance which his friend Pope predicted in a letter to Swift: "The Doctor goes to cards, Gay to court; the one loſes money, the other time."

Bolingbroke alſo obſerves to Swift, *June*, 1727, "I wiſh John Gay ſucceſs in his purſuit; yet I think he has ſome qualities, which will keep him down in the world. Good God! what is man? poliſhed, civilized, learned man! a liberal education fits him for ſlavery; and the pains he has taken gives him the noble pretenſion of dangling away life in an anti-chamber,

or

or of employing real talents to ſerve thoſe, who have none; or, which is worſe than all the reſt, of making his knowledge ſerve the purpoſes of other men's follies and vices."

With the hopes of ſupplying his neceſſity by writing for the ſtage, Gay compoſed a Comedy called *The Wife of Bath*, which was acted in 1715, but was damned. He had, however, more ſucceſs in a burleſque Farce, *The What D'ye Call it*, which the Prince and Princeſs honoured with their preſence. It was a new ſpecies of compoſition, and is called by the author a tragi-comic paſtoral farce; and it was ſometime before the ſpectators underſtood the drift of the ſcenes. Gay gave Pope a ludicrous accouut of the firſt performance in a letter dated *March* 19, 1715:

"The farce of The What D'ye Call It, has occaſioned many different ſpeculations in the town, ſome looking upon it as a mere jeſt upon the tragic poets, others as a ſatire upon the late war. Mr. Cromwell* hearing none of the words, and ſeeing the action to be tragical, was much aſtoniſhed to ſee the audience laugh, and ſays the Prince and Princeſs muſt doubtleſs be under no ſmall amazement on the ſame account. Se-

* Mr. Cromwell was deaf.

veral

veral templars, and others of the more vociferous kind of critics, went with a reſolution to hiſs, and confeſſed they were forced to laugh ſo much, that they forgot the deſign they came with. The court in general has in a very particular manner come into the jeſt, and the three nights, (notwithſtanding two of them were court-nights) were diſtinguiſhed by very full audiences of the firſt quality. The common people of the pit and gallery received it at firſt with great gravity and ſedateneſs, ſome few with tears; but after the third day, they alſo took the hint, and have ever ſince been very loud in their claps. There are ſtill ſober men, who cannot be of the general opinion; but the laughers are ſo much the majority, that one or two critics ſeem determined to undeceive the town at their proper coſt, by writing diſſertations againſt it. To encourage them in this laudable deſign, it is reſolved, a preface ſhall be prefixed to the farce, in vindication of the nature and dignity of this new way of writing."

Gay being of a ſanguine diſpoſition, was eaſily raiſed, and as eaſily depreſſed. He miſtook the uſual civilities of perſons of diſtinction for offers of aſſiſtance, and augured from the common promiſes of a court, certain preferment. He was accordingly ſubject to repeated mortifications,

cations, and Pope in alluſion to this circumſtance, gives him joy of the birth of a young Prince; "becauſe he is the only Prince with whom you have had no expectation and diſappointment."

This conſtant ſucceſſion of hopes and diſappointments, however, in addition to his want of œconomy and deſire of independence, made a deep impreſſion upon his irritable mind, and affected his health. To divert this melancholy he took a journey to his native county, at the recommendation of the Earl of Burlington, who defrayed the expences.

Gay was always extremely fond of rambling, and was humoured in this propenſity by ſeveral of his rich friends, ſome of whom were happy to have ſo agreeable a companion, and others, like Lord Burlington, paid the expence of his journey. In his ſecond Epiſtle he repaid the Earl of Burlington, by a humourous account of his tour in imitation of Horace. In his third Epiſtle he pays a tribute of gratitude to Mr. Pulteney afterwards Earl of Bath, who carried him to Aix, in the South of France. In this ſhort Poem, Gay draws a beautiful picture of Fenelon's Telemachus, and concludes with a panegyric on England:

"Let

"Let Cambray's name be ſung above the reſt,
Whoſe maxims, Pult'ney, warm thy patriot breaſt;
In Mentor's precepts, wiſdom ſtrong and clear,
Dictates ſublime, and diſtant nations hear.
Hear all ye princes, who the world controul,
What cares, what terrors haunt the tyrant's ſoul;
His conſtant train are anger, fear, diſtruſt;
To be a king, is to be good and juſt;
His people he protects, their rights he ſaves,
And ſcorns to rule a wretched race of ſlaves.

Happy, thrice happy ſhall the monarch reign,
Where guardian laws deſpotic pow'r reſtrain!
There ſhall the plough-ſhare break the ſtubborn land,
And bending harveſt tire the peaſant's hand:
There liberty her ſettled manſion boaſts,
There commerce plenty brings from foreign coaſts.
O Britain! guard thy laws, thy rights defend;
So ſhall theſe bleſſings to thy ſons deſcend!"

Swift agreeably rallies Gay for his propenſity to rambling:

"If your ramble was on horſeback, I am glad of it, upon account of your health; but I know your arts of patching up a journey between ſtage coaches and friends' coaches: for you are as arrant a cockney as any hoſier in cheapſide. One clean ſhirt, with two cravats, and as many handkerchiefs, make up your equipage;

page; and as for your night gown, it is clear from Homer, that Agamemnon roſe without one. I have often had it in my head to put it into yours, that you ought to have ſome great work in ſcheme, which may take up ſeven years to finiſh, beſides two or three under ones, that may add another thouſand pound to your ſtock; and then I ſhall be in leſs pain about you. I know you can find dinners, but then you love twelve-penny coaches too well, without conſidering that the intereſt of a whole thouſand pounds brings you but half-a-crown a day."

Proſpects however of better times ſeemed at laſt to open upon him. He was induced to publiſh his Poems by ſubſcription, and obtained very liberal encouragement. The Prince and Princeſs of Wales, accompanied their names with a very ample preſent; and amongſt the moſt munificent ſubſcribers, were the Duke of Chandos and the Earl of Burlington, for fifty copies: and Mr. Pulteney, for twenty-five. To this bountiful encouragement Gay alludes in his *Epiſtle to Paul Methuen, Eſq.*

"Yet let me not of grievances complain,
Who (though the meaneſt of the muſe's train)
Can boaſt ſubſcriptions to my humble lays,
And mingle profit with my little praiſe."

A thou-

A thouſand pounds which he had gained by this ſubſcription to his Poems, together with a ſum of money which Secretary Craggs had given him in the South-Sea ſtock, raiſed his expectations ſo high that he ſuppoſed himſelf maſter of twenty thouſand pounds. His friends perſuaded him to ſell his ſhare, which at one time would have produced that ſum; but he dreamed of dignity and ſplendour, and could not bear to obſtruct his own fortune. He was then importuned to ſell as much as would purchaſe an hundred a year for life, "which" ſays Fenton, "will make you ſure of a clean ſhirt and a ſhoulder of mutton every day." But Gay not only rejected this counſel, but his ſanguine diſpoſition anticipating future riches, he lived ſuitably to the proſpect, and when the bubble burſt, found himſelf reduced to his original indigence. Gay ſunk under this calamity, ſo that his life became in danger.

Although poor Gay ſuffered ſo ſeverely from this wreck of his little fortune, yet in his *Epiſtle to Mr. Thomas Snow*, he has happily ridiculed his own folly in truſting to ſuch viſionary ſchemes, and in being hurried away by the general infatuation in favour of the South-Sea Company:

"O thou

"O thou whoſe penetrative wiſdom found
The South-Sea rocks and ſhelves, where thouſands drown'd;
When credit ſunk, and commerce gaſping lay,
Thou ſtood'ſt, nor ſent'ſt one bill unpaid away.
When not a guinea chink'd on Martin's boards,
And Atwell's ſelf was drain'd of all his hoards,
Thou ſtoodſt an Indian King in ſize and hue;
Thy unexhauſted ſhop was our Peru.
Why did Change-Alley waſte thy precious hours
Among the fools who gap'd for golden ſhowers?
No wonder if we found ſome poets there,
Who live on fancy, and can feed on air;
No wonder they were caught by South-ſea ſchemes,
Who ne'er enjoy'd a guinea but in dreams;
No wonder, that their third ſubſcriptions ſold,
For millions of imaginary gold;
No wonder that their fancies wild can frame
Strange reaſons, that a thing is ſtill the ſame,
Though chang'd throughout in ſubſtance and in name."

By the care of his friends, among whom Pope appears to have ſhewn particular tenderneſs, his health was at length reſtored.

Returning to his ſtudies, Gay wrote a Tragedy called *The Captives*. The play was acted ſeven nights, and the author's third night, being by command of the Princeſs, it is probable that he gained a conſiderable ſum by her patronage.

He

He had formed at this period a great intimacy with the Earl of Burlington, who gave him apartments at Burlington houſe in London. But Gay did not ſeem to truſt too much to the civilities and promiſes of great perſons, whom Pope calls his fair-weather friends :

" I lodge at preſent in Burlington Houſe, and have received many civilities from many great men, but few real benefits. They wonder at each other for not providing for me, and I wonder at them all. Experience has alſo given me ſome knowledge of them ; ſo that I can ſay, that it is not in their power to diſappoint me."

He formed a right judgment in regard to Lord Burlington, for in a ſubſequent letter he complains of being neglected by him.

" Pope left me to try to find Lord Burlington, within whoſe walls I have not been admitted this year and a half."

In 1723, he was appointed Commiſſioner of the Lottery, as he himſelf informs Swift :

" I ſhall this year be a Commiſſioner of the State Lottery, which will be worth to me an hundred and fifty pounds. And I am not without hopes, that I have friends that will think of ſome better and more certain proviſion for me."

But

But he enjoyed this place only two years. On account of his intimacy with Bolingbroke, Swift, and Pultney, and perhaps from ſome indiſcreet expreſſions, Sir Robert Walpole had conceived a prejudice againſt him, and believed that he wrote a violent party pamphlet in oppoſition to the meaſures of government. He accordingly, in 1726, loſt his place.

His favour however with the Princeſs of Wales ſtill continued, and at her deſire, he wrote his Fables for the uſe of her ſon William, Duke of Cumberland.

On the acceſſion of George the Second, Gay flattered himſelf that his hope of promotion would be gratified; and his expectations were ſtill further increaſed when the Queen told Mrs. Howard, in alluſion to the Fable of the Hare and many Friends, that ſhe would take up the Hare; and ordered her to put her in mind, on ſettling the family, to find ſome employment for Mr. Gay. But poor Gay was doomed to greater diſappointments; for theſe promiſes were ſo magnified by his ſanguine temper, that the offer of being Gentleman Uſher to the Princeſs Louiſa, a girl of two years old, though a place worth two hundred a year, was conſidered as an

 inſult,

inſult, and rejected; of which he gives an account in a letter to Swift:

"But why ſhould I tell you what you know already? The Queen's family is at laſt ſettled; and in the liſt I was appointed Gentleman Uſher to the Princeſs Louiſa, the youngeſt Princeſs; which, upon account that I am ſo far advanced in life, I have declined accepting; and I have endeavoured in the beſt manner I could, to make my excuſes by a letter to her Majeſty. So now all my expectations are vaniſhed; and I have no proſpect but in depending wholly upon myſelf and my own conduct. As I am uſed to diſappointments I can bear them; but as I can have no more hopes, I can no more be diſappointed; ſo that I am in a bleſſed condition."

To his rejection of this place, Swift alludes, in his libel on Dr. Delany and Lord Carteret:

"Thus Gay, the Hare with many Friends,
Twice ſev'n long years the *Court* attends,
Who under tales conveying truth,
To virtue form'd a princely youth:
Who paid his courtſhip with the croud,
As far as *modeſt pride* allow'd;
Rejects a ſervile Uſher's place,
And leaves St. James's in diſgrace."

And again in ſome verſes addreſſed to Gay,

"How

"How could you Gay diſgrace the muſe's ſtrain,
To ſerve a taſteleſs court twelve years in vain!
Fain would I think our female * friend ſincere,
Till Bob, the poet's foe, poſſeſt her ear;
Did female virtue e'er ſo high aſcend,
To loſe an inch of favour for a friend?
Say, had the court no better place to chuſe
For thee, than make a dry nurſe of thy muſe?
How cheaply had thy liberty been ſold,
To ſquire a royal girl of two years old,
In leading ſtrings her infant ſteps to guide,
Or with her go-cart amble ſide by ſide!"

Swift, in theſe lines, accuſes Sir Robert Walpole, whom he calls "*Bob, the poet's foe,*" of having occaſioned the diſappointment of Gay, and in ſome other parts of his work he repeats the ſame accuſation.

In a letter to Lady Betty Germaine, dated *January*, 1733, he ſays, "Gay had written a very ingenious book of Fables for the uſe of her younger ſon, and ſhe often promiſed to provide for him. But ſome time before there came out a libel againſt Mr. Walpole, who was informed it was written by Mr. Gay; and although Mr. Walpole owned he was convinced it was not written by Gay, yet he never would pardon him,

* Mrs. Howard.

and did him an hundred ill offices with the Prince and Princeſs."

It is but a juſtice due to the memory of that great Miniſter to obſerve that Swift was ſo highly prejudiced againſt him, that his teſtimony in this inſtance, cannot be taken without great caution. Nor is there the leaſt reaſon to believe that Walpole ſet the Princeſs againſt Gay.

One part of Swift's aſſertion is evidently falſe: Sir Robert Walpole was at the time that Gay publiſhed his Fables out of favour with the Prince and Princeſs of Wales, and it was generally ſuppoſed, that, on the acceſſion of George the ſecond, he would have been diſmiſſed. For this reaſon at that time (even if he had been ever ſo much inclined) he could not do Gay any ill offices with the Princeſs; nor is it probable that he had any ſhare in the arrangement of the Queen's houſehold.

It is moſt likely that Queen Caroline offered the place to Gay of her own accord; ſhe never intended it as an offence, and could not imagine, that the offer of a place worth two hundred pounds a year as a recompence for writing his Fables, would offend an author, who was always complaining of his poverty.

The

The ſanguine diſpoſition of Gay had exaggerated his own ſervices, and he confided too much in the promiſes of a court; not chuſing to offend the Queen, he with Swift laid the *whole* blame on Sir Robert Walpole, and made him the object of his ſatire; and his friends readily believed and adopted any charge levelled againſt the Miniſter, whom they deteſted.

But whatever was the cauſe of his diſappointment, Gay did not bear it like a philoſopher. In vain his friend Pope endeavoured to conſole him:

October 6, 1727.

"I have many years ago magnified, in my own mind, and repeated to you, a ninth beatitude, added to the eight in the ſcripture: 'Bleſſed is he who expects nothing, for he ſhall never be diſappointed.' I could find in my heart to congratulate you on this happy diſmiſſion from all court-dependance; I dare ſay I ſhall find you the better and the honeſter man for it, many years hence; very probably the healthfuller, and the chearfuller into the bargain. You are happily rid of many curſed ceremonies, as well as of many ill, and vicious habits, of which few or no men eſcape the infection, who are hackneyed and trammelled in the ways of a court. Princes indeed, and Peers (the lackies of Princes) and

Ladies (the fools of Peers) will ſmile on you the leſs; but men of worth and real friends will look on you the better. There is a thing, the only thing which Kings and Queens cannot give you, (for they have it not to give) liberty, and which is worth all they have; which as I now thank God, Engliſhmen need not aſk from their hands. You will enjoy that, and your own integrity, and the ſatisfactory conſciouſneſs of having *not* merited ſuch graces from courts as are beſtowed only on the mean, ſervile, flattering, intereſted, and undeſerving. The only ſteps to the favour of the Great are ſuch complacences, ſuch compliances, ſuch diſtant decorums, as delude them in their vanities, or engage them in their paſſions. He is their greateſt favourite, who is the falſeſt: and when a man, by ſuch vile gradations, arrives at the height of grandeur and power, he is then at beſt but in a circumſtance to be hated, and in a condition to be hanged for ſerving their ends: ſo many a Miniſter has found it!

CHAPTER THE SECOND.

Succeſs of the Beggar's Opera.—Remarks on that performance.—Gay prepares a ſecond part called Polly for the ſtage, but is prevented from bringing it on by the Lord Chamberlain.—His fortune promoted by that event—Obtains large ſubſcriptions.—Acquires the protection and friendſhip of the Duke and Ducheſs of Queenſberry.—His fortune increaſes.—His reſolutions and plans of œconomy.—His ſudden illneſs and death.—Regret of his friends.

THE chagrin which Gay ſuffered from this failure of his expectations, was in ſome meaſure alleviated by the ſucceſs of the *Beggar's Opera*, which was firſt performed in the beginning of 1728.

" This piece was received with greater applauſe than ever was known. Beſides being

acted in London ſixty-three days without interruption, and renewed the next ſeaſon with equal applauſe; it ſpread into all the great towns of England; was played in many places to the thirtieth and fortieth time; at Bath and Briſtol fifty, &c. It made its progreſs into Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, where it was performed twenty-four days ſucceſſively. The ladies carried about with them the favourite ſongs of it in fans, and houſes were furniſhed with it in ſcreens. The fame of it was not confined to the author only. Miſs Fenton, who acted Polly, till then obſcure, became all at once the favourite of the town; her pictures were engraved and ſold in great numbers; her life written, books of letters and verſes to her publiſhed, and pamphlets made even of her ſayings and jeſts. Furthermore, it drove out of England, (for that ſeaſon) the Italian Opera, which had carried all before it for ten years."*

It is generally ſuppoſed that Gay wrote his Beggar's Opera after his diſappointment at Court, and that he uſed it as a vehicle of his ſpleen and ſatyr, but it appears from the letter to Swift, in which he announces his refuſal of the place of Gentleman Uſher, that he had al-

* Notes on the Dunciad.

ready

ready almoſt finiſhed that muſical drama. But it is probable that he added ſeveral ſatirical alluſions which would not have appeared if he had not been diſſatisfied with the court:

"You remember that you were adviſing me to go to Newgate, to finiſh my ſcenes the more correctly. I now think I ſhall, for I have no attendance to hinder me; but my Opera is already finiſhed."

Nothing proves more the partiality of friendſhip, than that Swift ſhould commend the Beggar's Opera for the excellence of its morality, and repreſent it as a piece that placed all kinds of vice in the ſtrongeſt and moſt odious light, and that he ſhould abuſe Herring, afterwards Archbiſhop of Canterbury, as a court chaplain, for having cenſured it, as giving encouragement to vice, by making a highwayman the hero, and diſmiſſing him at laſt unpuniſhed. Nor is it leſs an object of wonder, that even the moral Johnſon ſhould, in commenting on theſe two oppoſite opinions obſerve, "both theſe deciſions are ſurely exagerated. The play, like many others, was plainly written only to divert, without any moral purpoſe, and is therefore not likely to do good, nor can it be conceived, without more ſpeculation than life requires or admits, to be productive of much evil. High-

way-men and houſe-breakers ſeldom frequent the play-houſe, or mingle in any elegant diverſion; nor is it poſſible for any one to imagine that he may rob with ſafety, becauſe he ſees Macheath reprieved on the ſtage."

Surely Johnſon could not ſeriouſly be of opinion, that a play which introduces ſuch licentious ſcenes, which abounds with ſo many indecent ballads; which renders vice amuſing inſtead of diſguſting, and exhibits the inſide of a priſon as a ſcene of jollity and thoughtleſſneſs, rather than of diſtreſs and repentance; cannot be productive of much evil; or that highway-men and houſe-breakers ſeldom frequent the play-houſes? It does not require much knowledge of human nature, to be convinced of the contrary. Pick-pockets are well known to frequent theatres, and experience has proved, that the repreſentation of the Beggar's Opera has had the worſt effect: as Sir John Fielding, whoſe judgment in this inſtance, muſt be allowed to be ſuperior to that of Johnſon, was frequently heard to declare, that many robbers had confeſſed that they had been ſeduced by the Beggar's Opera to begin the commiſſion of thoſe crimes which finally brought them to the gallows.

In fact, if the Beggar's Opera has any moral, it conſiſts in this, that rogues are made to impeach

peach each other: but even this moral looſes its effect, from the ludicrous manner in which it is conſtantly conveyed; in a ſtrain of irony, which the common people do not comprehend.

The ſhouts of applauſe which burſt from the gallery when Macheath is reprieved, fully prove that no permanent impreſſion has been made by the awful truth affected to be inculcated in ſome of the ſcenes, that juſtice, ſooner or later, overtakes the guilty; and that the people are ſo intereſted in the character of the hero, as to rejoice in his eſcape from the gallows, and retire with the conviction that crimes may be ſometimes committed with impunity.

Emboldened by the ſucceſs of the Beggar's Opera, Gay wrote *Polly*, a ſecond part; in which, according to a hint given in the laſt ſcene, Polly, Macheath, and ſome of the other characters are tranſported to America.

Polly, or the ſequel of the Beggar's Opera, is far from poſſeſſing the ſpirit and vivacity of the firſt part. The ſcenes, though not to be commended for their purity, are not ſo licentious as thoſe in the Beggar's Opera, and the moral, which at this time inflicts puniſhment on Macheath, under the diſguiſed character of Morano, a Negro, for cruelty and piracy, was

intended as a contraſt for "having," as the Poet himſelf ſays in the Introduction, "given up his moral for a joke, like a fine gentleman in converſation."

As the new piece was going to be rehearſed, a prohibition came from the Lord Chamberlain.

"What could be the reaſon of ſuch a prohibition," ſays the author of an Hiſtorical Account of the Dramatic Writers, "it is not very eaſy to diſcover, unleſs we imagine it to have been by way of revenge for the numerous ſtrokes of ſatire upon the court, &c. which ſhone forth in the firſt part; or from ſome private pique to the author himſelf; for the Opera before us is ſo totally innocent of either ſatire, wit, plot, or execution, that had not Mr. Gay declaredly publiſhed it as his, it would, I think, have been difficult to have perſuaded the world that their favorite, Polly, could ever have ſo greatly degenerated from thoſe charms which firſt brought them in love with her, or that the author of the Beggar's Opera was capable of ſo poor a performance as the piece before us.—But this is frequently the caſe with ſecond parts, undertaken by their authors, in conſequence of ſome extraordinary ſucceſs of the firſt, wherein the writer having before exhauſted the whole of his intended plan, hazards, and often loſes in a

ſecond

ſecond attempt, for the ſake of the profit, all the reputation he had juſtly acquired by the firſt."

In the Preface to Polly, Gay gives an account of the whole affair: "On Thurſday, December 12, I received this anſwer from the Chamberlain, that it could not be allowed to be acted, but ſuppreſſed. This was told me in general, without any reaſon aſſigned, or any charge againſt me, of my having given any particular offence. Since this prohibition, I have been told that I am accuſed, in general terms, of having written many diſaffected libels and ſeditious pamphlets. As it hath ever been my utmoſt ambition (if that word may be uſed on this occaſion) to lead a quiet and inoffenſive life, I thought my innocence in this particular would never have needed a juſtification; and as this kind of writing is what I ever deteſted, and never practiſed, I am perſuaded ſo groundleſs a calumny can never be believed but by thoſe who do not know me. But when general aſperſions of this ſort have been caſt upon me, I think myſelf called upon to declare my principles; and I do, with the ſtricteſt truth, affirm, that I am as loyal a ſubject, and as firmly attached to the preſent happy eſtabliſhment, as any of thoſe who have the greateſt places or penſions. I have been informed too, that in the following play I have been charged with writing immoralities; that

that it is filled with ſlander and calumny againſt particular great perſons, and that Majeſty itſelf is endeavoured to be brought into ridicule and contempt."

"As I knew that every one of theſe charges was in every point abſolutely falſe, and without the leaſt grounds, at firſt I was not at all affected by them; but when I found they were ſtill inſiſted upon, and that particular paſſages which were not in the play were quoted, and propagated to ſupport what had been ſuggeſted, I could no longer bear to lie under thoſe falſe accuſations; ſo by printing it I have ſubmitted, and given up all preſent views of profit, which might accrue from the ſtage; which will, undoubtedly be ſome ſatisfaction to the worthy gentlemen who have treated me with ſo much candour and humanity, and repreſented me in ſuch favourable colours. But as I am conſcious to myſelf, that my only intention was to laſh in general, the reigning and faſhionable vices, and to recommend and ſet virtue in as amiable a light as I could; to juſtify and vindicate my own character, I thought myſelf obliged to print the Opera without delay, in the manner I have done."

The prohibition of the performance of Polly, by the Lord Chamberlain, proved a moſt fortunate

tunate occurrence. Gay was held up as a man perſecuted by the Miniſter; his play was printed by ſubſcription: the patronage of the Poet, who had been neglected by the Court, was warmly promoted by the party in oppoſition; his popularity was augmented, his fortune increaſed, as he himſelf ſaid, by oppreſſion; and he was indemnified for all his diſappointments, by acquiring the protection of the Duke and Ducheſs of Queenſberry, of whoſe kindneſs and attention he dwells with gratitude in a letter to Swift, dated March 18, 1728.

"I am now in the Duke of Queenſberry's houſe, where I was carried at a time that it was thought I could not live a day. I muſt acquaint you, (becauſe I know it will pleaſe you) that during my ſickneſs, I had many of the kindeſt proofs of friendſhip, particularly from the Duke and Ducheſs of Queenſberry, who, if I had been their neareſt relation, and neareſt friend, could not have treated me with more conſtant attendance then, and they continue the ſame to me now. You muſt undoubtedly have heard, that the Ducheſs took up my defence with the King and Queen, in the cauſe of my play, and that ſhe has been forbid the court, for intereſting herſelf to increaſe my fortune, by the publication of it, without being acted. The Duke too, hath given

given up his employments, (which he would have done if the Ducheſs had not met with this treatment) upon account of the ill-uſage from the miniſters; but this haſtened him in what he had determined."

Arbuthnot alſo gives a humourous account of the impreſſions which had been formed againſt him at court, of his influence over many great perſons, and of his extreme popularity. "I may ſay, without vanity, Gay's life, under God, is due to the unwearied endeavours and care of your humble ſervant; for a phyſician, who had not been paſſionately his friend, could not have ſaved him. I had, beſides my perſonal concern for him, other motives for my care. He is now become a public perſon, a little Sacheverell, and I took the ſame pleaſure in ſaving him, as Radcliffe did in preſerving my Lord Chief Juſtice Holt's wife, whom he attended out of ſpite to her huſband, who wiſhed her dead."

"The inoffenſive John Gay is now become one of the obſtructions to the peace of Europe, the terror of the miniſtry, the chief author of the Craftſman,* and all the ſeditious pamphlets,

* An oppoſition paper chiefly under the direction of Bolingbroke and Pulteney.

which

which have been publiſhed againſt government. He has got ſeveral turned out of their places; the greateſt ornament* of the court baniſhed from it for his ſake; another great lady † in danger of being changed likewiſe; about ſeven or eight Ducheſſes puſhing forward, like the ancient circumceliones in the church, who ſhall ſuffer martyrdom on his account firſt. He is the darling of the city; if he ſhould travel about the country, he would have hecatombs of roaſted oxen ſacrificed to him; ſince he became ſo conſpicuous, Will. Pulteney hangs his head to ſee himſelf ſo much out-done in the career of glory. I hope he will get a good deal of money by printing his play; but I really believe, he would get more money by ſhewing his perſon: and I can aſſure you, this is the very identical John Gay whom you formerly knew, and lodged with in Whitehall, two years ago."

Gay was now worth three thouſand pounds, and ſeems to have formed ſtrong reſolutions no longer to diſſipate his fortune, but to correct his natural thoughtleſſneſs and extravagance; for which Swift was accuſtomed to rally him.

* Ducheſs of Queenſberry.

† Mrs. Howard, afterwards Counteſs of Suffolk.

In his letters to Swift, written in 1729, 1730, or 1731, he dwells with peculiar pleaſure on theſe reſolutions, and on the proſpect which he entertains of becoming independent:

"The fortune of the perſon you intereſt yourſelf in, amounts to at preſent (all debts paid) above three thouſand four hundred pounds; ſo that, whatever other people may think, I look upon him, as to fortune, to be happy, that is to ſay an independent creature. I am now got to my reſidence at Ameſbury, getting health, and ſaving money."

"I am grown ſo ſaving of late, that I very often reproach myſelf for being covetous; and I am very often afraid that I ſhall have the trouble of having money, and never have the pleaſure of making uſe of it."

"I am grown ſo much a man of buſineſs, that is to ſay, ſo covetous, that I cannot bear to let a ſum of money lie idle."—*July* 18, 1731.

"You uſed to blame me for over ſolicitude about myſelf. I am now grown ſo rich, that I don't think myſelf worth thinking on."

"You have often twitted me in the act for hankering after the court. In that you miſtook me;

me; for I know by experience, that there is no dependance that can be ſure, but a dependance upon one's ſelf. I will take care of the little fortune I have got. I know you will take this reſolution kindly."

December 1, 1731.

"I have nothing to take me off from my friendſhip with you: I ſeek no new acquaintance, and court no favour; I ſpend no ſhillings in coaches and chairs, to levees or great viſits; and as I don't want the aſſiſtance of ſome that I formerly converſed with, I will not ſo much as ſeem to ſeek to be a dependant. As to my ſtudies, I have not been entirely idle, though I cannot ſay that I have yet perfected any thing; what I have done is ſomething in the way of thoſe Fables I have already publiſhed. All the money I get is by ſaving, ſo that by habit there may be ſome hopes, if I grow richer, of my becoming a miſer. All miſers have their excuſes; the motive to parſimony is independance. If I were to be repreſented by the Ducheſs, (ſhe is a downright niggard for me) this character might not be allowed me; but I really think I am covetous enough for any one who lives at the court end of the town, and who is as poor as myſelf."

"I am ordered by the Ducheſs to grow rich in the manner of Sir John Cutler. I have nothing

thing at this preſent writing, but my frock that was made at Saliſbury, and a bob perriwig. I perſuade myſelf that it is ſhilling weather as ſeldom as poſſible; and have found out, that there are few court viſits worth a ſhilling. In ſhort, I am very happy in my preſent independency. I envy no man; but have the due contempt of voluntary ſlaves of birth and fortune."

But Gay's friends did not truſt to his own reſolutions. The Duke and Ducheſs of Queenſberry knowing his want of œconomy, undertook the management of his money, and only entruſted him with as much as his immediate wants required. To this diſtribution of his finances Gay humouroufly alludes, in a letter to Swift:

"The Ducheſs is a more ſevere check upon my finances than ever you were; and I ſubmit as I did to you, to comply to my own good. I was a long time before I could prevail upon her to let me allow myſelf a pair of ſhoes with two heels; for I had loſt one, and the ſhoes were ſo decayed that they were not worth mending. You ſee by this, that thoſe who are the moſt generous of their own, can be the moſt covetous for others. I hope you will be ſo good to me, as to uſe your intereſt with her, (for, whatever

ſhe

ſhe ſays, you ſeem to have ſome) to indulge me with the extravagance ſuitable to my preſent fortune."—*December* 6, 1730.

His ſituation in the family of the Duke of Queenſberry, although he was treated with aſſiduouſneſs and attention, muſt have been irkſome to a feeling and irritable mind.

The old Proverb—"Home is home though never ſo homely" occurred frequently to his recollection.

"I am not thinking," he writes to Swift, "of a court, or preferment; for I think the lady I live with is my friend, ſo that I am at the height of my ambition. You have often told me there is a time of life that every one wiſhes for ſome ſettlement of his own. I have frequently that feeling about me, but I fancy it will hardly ever be my lot; ſo that I will endeavour to paſs away life as agreeably as I can, the way I am."—*Ameſbury, July* 4, 1730.

His friends were alſo continually repreſenting to him the comforts of an independent ſituation.

"I hope

"I hope," writes Swift, "when you are rich enough, you will have ſome little œconomy of your own in town or country, and be able to give your friend a pint of Port, for the domeſtic ſeaſon will come on."

"I writ lately to Pope. I wiſh you had a little ſituation in his neighbourhood, for you are yet too volatile; and any lady with a coach and ſix horſes would carry you to Pekin."

Gay ſeemed, however, now on the point of realizing his wiſhes: had he lived, he would have greatly increaſed his fortune by writing for the ſtage; and might have enjoyed the comfort of a home of his own, ſo much coveted by him and his friends.

"My ambition," he writes in a letter to Swift, March 31, 1730, "is at preſent levelled to the ſame point that you direct me to; for I am every day building villakins, and have given over that of caſtles. If I were to undertake it in my preſent circumſtances, I ſhould in the moſt thrifty ſcheme ſoon be ſtraitened; and I hate to be in debt, for I can't bear to pawn five pounds worth of my liberty to a taylor or a butcher."

After

After the publication of the Beggar's Opera, Gay could not expect any countenance from the Court; for if even he did not intend it as a ſatire againſt the Miniſter, yet the author of the Craftſman, a political paper on the ſide of oppoſition, drew, with all the virulence of party and great keenneſs of wit, a ludicrous compariſon between the Miniſter and Locket, whom he called the keeper or prime miniſter of Newgate, and quoted ſeveral of the ballads, as applicable to ſtateſmen and courtiers.

In alluſion to Sir Robert Walpole, who was extremely corpulent, the Craftſman obſerves, "There are ſome perſons who eſteem Locket the keeper or prime miniſter of Newgate, to be the hero of the piece; to juſtify which opinion, they take notice that he is ſet forth on the ſtage in the perſon of Mr. Hall, as a very corpulent bulky man."*

Gay vainly thought that by writing againſt the court and ſatyriſing the miniſter, he ſhould compel them to purchaſe his ſilence; but in this opinion he was no leſs grievouſly diſappointed than in his former expectations. The melancholy ſtate of mind which was occaſioned by

* The Craftſman, N°. 85.

theſe

theſe repeated diſappointments, is beſt deſcribed by himſelf in a letter to Pope:

"My melancholy," ſays he, "increaſes, and every hour threatens me with ſome return of my diſtemper; nay, I may rather ſay I have it on me. Not the divine looks, the kind favors and expreſſions of the divine Ducheſs, (who hereafter ſhall be in place of a Queen to me, nay, ſhe ſhall be my Queen) nor the inexpreſſible goodneſs of the Duke, can in the leaſt cheer me. The drawing room no more receives light from theſe two ſtars. There is now (what Milton ſays in Hell) darkneſs viſible. O that I had never known what a court was. Dear Pope! what a barren ſoil (to me ſo) have I been ſtriving to produce ſomething out of! Why did I not take your advice before my writing Fables for the Duke, not to write them, or rather to write them for ſome young nobleman? It is my hard fate: I muſt get nothing, write for them or againſt them."

This letter conveys a ſtriking and pathetic deſcription of that ſad dejection of ſpirits under which he laboured. To ſome this deſpondency may appear the proof of a weak mind, incapable of ſupporting the common and unavoidable accidents of life; to others it may with no leſs propriety rather be attributed to the irritability of

of diſeaſe. But from whatever cauſe it originated, it is a melancholy reflection, that the chagrin occaſioned by his diſappointments, always embittered his reflections, and preying upon a weak conſtitution, prematurely haſtened his death.

Gay had ſome time felt his health declining. In a letter to Pope, October 7, 1732, he ſays,

"I am at laſt returned from my Somerſetſhire expedition, but ſince my return I cannot boaſt of my health as before I went, for I am frequently out of order with my colical complaint, ſo as to make me uneaſy and diſpirited, tho' not to any violent degree.

"All this journey I performed on horſeback, and am very much diſappointed that at preſent I feel myſelf ſo little the better for it. I have indeed followed riding and exerciſe for three months ſucceſſively, and really think I was as well without it; ſo that I begin to fear the illneſs I have ſo long and ſo often complained of, is inherent in my conſtitution, and that I have nothing for it but patience."

In another letter he expreſſes himſelf in the following terms:

"I find myſelf in ſuch a ſtrange confuſion and dejection of ſpirits, that I have not ſtrength

enough to make my will, though I perceive, by many warnings, I have no continuing city here. I begin to look upon myſelf as one already dead, and deſire my dear Mr. Pope, whom I love as my own ſoul, if you ſurvive me, as you certainly will, if a ſtone ſhould mark the place of my grave, ſee theſe words put upon it:

"Life is a jeſt, and all things ſhow it,
I thought ſo once, but now I know it."

With what you may think proper. If any body ſhould aſk, how I could communicate this after death? let it be known it is not meant ſo, but my preſent ſentiments in life. What the bearer brings beſide this letter, ſhould I die without a will, which I am the likelier to do, as the law will ſettle my little eſtate much as I ſhould myſelf, let it remain with you as it has long done with me,—a remembrance of a dead friend. But there is none like you, living or dead."

In this uncertain ſtate of health, he came to town, for the purpoſe of preparing the Opera of *Achilles* for the ſtage; he caught a fever which fell into his bowels, and carried him off in leſs than three days.

Pope thus feelingly expreſſes himſelf on that event, in a letter to Swift:

"It

December 8, 1732.

"It is not a time to complain that you have not anſwered my two letters. It is now indeed a time to think of myſelf, when one of the neareſt and longeſt ties I ever had, is broken of a ſudden, by the unexpected death of poor Mr. Gay. An inflammatory fever hurried him out of life in leſs than three days; he died laſt night at nine o'clock, not deprived of his ſenſes entirely at laſt, and poſſeſſing them perfectly till within five hours. He aſked of you a few hours before, when in acute torment, by an inflammation in his bowels and breaſt.

"Good God! how often are we to die before we quit this ſtage. In every friend we loſe a part of ourſelves, and the beſt part. God keep thoſe we have left."

This letter was received by Swift on the fifteenth of December, but he did not open it till the twentieth, from an impulſe foreboding ſome misfortune; and he thus laments his loſs, in a letter to the Ducheſs of Queenſberry:

March 20, 1732.

"The greateſt unhappineſs of my life is grown a comfort under the death of my friend, I mean my baniſhment in this miſerable coun-

try; for the diſtance I am at, and the deſpair I have of ever ſeeing my friends, further than by a ſummer viſit; and this, ſo late in my life, ſo uncertain in my health, and ſo embroiled in my little affairs, may probably never happen, ſo that my loſs is not ſo great as that of his other friends, who had it in their power to converſe with him. But I chiefly lament your Grace's misfortune, becauſe I greatly fear, with all the perfections which can poſſibly acquire veneration to a mortal creature from the worthieſt of human kind, you will never be able to procure another ſo uſeful, ſo ſincere, ſo virtuous, ſo diſintereſted, ſo entertaining, ſo eaſy, and ſo humble a friend, as that perſon whoſe death all good men lament."

No man was ever more regretted by his friends than Gay.

Arbuthnot to Swift.

London, January 13, 1732.

"We have all had another loſs of our worthy and dear friend, Mr. Gay. It was ſome alleviation of my grief to ſee him ſo univerſally lamented by almoſt every body, even by thoſe who knew him only by reputation. He was interred at Weſtminſter Abbey as if he had been a peer of the realm, and the good Duke of Queenſ-

Queenſberry, who lamented him as a brother, will ſet up a handſome monument upon him."

Pope to Swift.

"It is indeed impoſſible to ſpeak on ſuch a ſubject as the loſs of Mr. Gay,—to me an irreparable one.

"You ſay truly that death is only terrible as it ſeparates us from thoſe we love, but I really think thoſe have the worſt of it who are left by us, if we are true friends. I have felt more, I fancy, in the loſs of Mr. Gay, than I ſhall ſuffer in the thought of going away myſelf into a ſtate that can feel none of its loſſes.

"I wiſhed vehemently to have ſeen him in a condition of living independent, and to have lived in perfect indolence the reſt of our days together, the two moſt idle, moſt innocent, undeſigning poets of our age."

The Ducheſs of Queenſberry to Swift.

"Soon after the death of our friend Mr. Gay, I found myſelf more inclined to write to you than to allow myſelf any other entertainment.

"If I have any good in me, I certainly learned it inſenſibly of our poor friend, as children do any ſtrange language. It is not poſſi-

ble to imagine the loſs his death is to me; but as long as I have any memory, the happineſs of ever having had ſuch a friend can never be loſt to me.

April 12, 1733.

"Whilſt I had that very ſincere good friend, I could ſometimes lay open all my rambling thoughts, and he and I would often view and diſſect them; but now they come and go, and I ſeldom find out whether they be right or wrong, or if there be any thing in them. Poor man! he was moſt truly every thing you could ſay of him."

Lord Bathurſt to Swift.

"Poor John Gay! we ſhall ſee him no more; but he will always be remembered by thoſe who knew him with a tender concern."

Pope paid a beautiful tribute of regret to the memory of his departed friend:

"Bleſt be the *great!* for thoſe they take away,
And thoſe they left me, for they left me Gay;
Left me to ſee neglected genius bloom,
Neglected die, and tell it on his tomb:
Of all thy blameleſs life the ſole return,
My verſe, and Queenſb'ry weeping o'er thy urn."

Pope's Prologue to the Satires.

CHAPTER THE THIRD.

SOCIAL Character, Perſon, and Manners of Gay.—Remarks on his Poetical Character—and particularly as a Writer of Fables.—His eminent Merit in that Line.

THE ſocial Character of Gay is delineated in ſuch ſtrong and natural colours by his friends Pope and Swift, and by himſelf in his own letters, that we almoſt think we ſee the man: we love the playfulneſs of his temper, we are intereſted in all his purſuits; we almoſt think him more amiable for his very failings, we cheriſh his foibles, we pity his deſpondency, we feel for his diſappointments, and we are pleaſed at his ſucceſſes.

Pope, who knew him beſt, has delineated the principal trait of his character, in one line of his Epitaph:

"In wit, a man;—ſimplicity, a child."

And in proſe, he ſaid of him, "He was a natural man without deſign who ſpoke what he thought, and juſt as he thought it; and he was of a timid temper, fearful of giving offence to the great."*

In fact the temper and manners of Gay were exactly the temper and manners of a child, as he retained in an advanced age all the feelings and ſentiments peculiar to that early period. He was by turns thoughtleſs and over ſolicitous; careleſs and provident; playful and ſerious; timid before ſtrangers, but volatile in the company of his acquaintance; ſuddenly elated, and ſuddenly depreſſed; without guile himſelf and ſuſpecting none in others; confiding in promiſes, fearful of giving offence, yet frank and indiſcreet in uttering his thoughts.

His phyſiognomy does not appear to have been remarkable for ſtrong lines or expreſſive features; it rather denoted benignity and meekneſs.

Gay muſt ſurely have poſſeſſed wonderful ſweetneſs of temper, who never diſpleaſed the humourſome and miſanthropic Swift, the ner-

* Johnſon's Life of Gay, from Spence.

vous

vous and irritable Pope, the courtly Lady Suffolk, and the eccentric, though benevolent, Ducheſs of Queenſberry.

In his perſon, Gay was inclined to corpulency; a circumſtance which he humouroufly aludes to, in his Epiſtle to Lord Burlington:

——" You knew *fat* bards might tire,
And mounted ſent me forth your truſty 'ſquire."

His natural corpulency was increaſed by extreme indolence, for which his friends often rallied him. Swift, in a letter to the Ducheſs of Queenſberry, thus expreſſes himſelf on this ſubject: " You need not be in pain about Mr. Gay's ſtock of health, I promiſe you he will ſpend it all upon lazineſs, and run deep in debt by a winter's repoſe in town; therefore, I entreat your Grace will order him to move his chaps leſs, and his legs more, the ſix cold months, elſe he will ſpend all his money in phyſic and coach-hire."—*October* 3, 1731.

Pope alſo thus writes to him: " Fenton died at Eaſthamſtead, of indolence and inactivity; let it not be your fate, but uſe exerciſe. I hope the Ducheſs will take care of you in this reſpect, and either make you gallop after her, or teize you enough at home to ſerve for exerciſe abroad."

Swift, writing to him, ſays, "Pray conſult with Dr. Arbuthnot and Dr. Cheney, to what exact pitch your belly may be ſuffered to ſwell, and to outgrow their's, who are as yet your betters."

In another letter, Swift alſo obſerves, "I find by the whole caſt of your letter, that you are as giddy and volatile as ever, juſt the reverſe of Mr. Pope, who hath always loved domeſtic life from his youth. I was going to wiſh you had ſome little place that you could call your own; but I profeſs, I do not know you well enough to contrive any one ſyſtem of life that would ſuit you. You pretend to preach up walking and riding to the Ducheſs, yet from my knowledge of you for twenty years, you have always joined a violent deſire of perpetually ſhifting places and company, with a rooted lazineſs, and an utter impatience of fatigue. A coach and ſix horſes is the utmoſt exertion you can bear, and this only when you can fill it with ſuch company as is beſt ſuited to your taſte; and how glad would you be if it could waft you in the air to avoid jolting; while I, who am ſo much later in life, can, or at leaſt could ride five hundred miles on a trotting horſe. You mortally hate writing, only becauſe it is the thing you chiefly ought to do; as well to keep up the vogue you have in the world, as to make you eaſy in your fortune.

tune. You are merciful to every thing but money, your beſt friend, whom you treat with inhumanity."

With his intimate friends, Gay was lively and entertaining, when not dejected in ſpirits from reflecting on his own dependent ſituation. But his feeling mind was ſeldom free from this anxiety, to which Swift alludes:

November 16, 1730.

"I hope you have now one advantage that you always wanted before, and the want of which made your friends as uneaſy as it did yourſelf; I mean the removal of that ſolicitude about your own affairs which perpetually filled your thoughts, and diſturbed your imagination."

He ſeems indeed to have been always conſcious of his dependent ſituation, and therefore not capable of making great exertions either of body or mind.

This dejection of ſpirits increaſed at times to that height as to check his natural and almoſt infantine vivacity, and render him abſent and inattentive; for which Swift rallies him in his ſportive way:

" Your colic is owing to intemperance of the philoſophical kind; you eat without care, and if you drink leſs than I, you drink too little. But your inattention I cannot pardon, becauſe I imagined the cauſe was removed, for I thought it lay in your forty millions of court hopes and court fears. Yet Mr. Pope has the ſame defect, and it is, of all others, the moſt mortal to converſation; neither is my Lord Bolingbroke untinged with it;—all for want of my rule—*Vive la bagatelle!* but the Doctor is the King of inattention. What a vexatious life ſhould I lead among you? If the Ducheſs be a *reveuſe*, I will never come to Ameſbury; or if I do, I will run away from you both, to one of her women, and the ſteward and chaplain."

And in a letter to the Ducheſs of Queenſberry, Swift ſays, " I never knew any man cured of inattention, although the pretended cauſe were removed. When I was with Mr. Gay laſt in London, talking to him on ſome poetical ſubjects, he would anſwer, " Well I am determined not to accept the place of Gentleman Uſher;" and of the ſame diſpoſition were all my poetical friends, and if you cannot cure him, I ſhall utterly deſpair.

" Mr. Gay is not diſcreet enough to live alone, but he is too diſcreet to live alone; and yet,

yet, unleſs you mend him, he will live alone even in your Grace's company."

In the early part of his life, Gay was extremely fond of dreſs; a foible which he has ridiculed in his Prologue to the Shepherd's Week:

"I ſold my ſheep and lambkins too,
For ſilver loops and garments blue;
My boxen hautboy, ſweet of ſound,
For lace that edged mine hat around;
For Lightfoot and my ſcrip, I got,
A gorgeous ſword and eke a knot."

Pope alſo touches upon this weakneſs, in a letter to Swift:

December 18, 1713.

"One Mr. Gay, an unhappy youth, who writes paſtorals during the time of divine ſervice; whoſe caſe is the more deplorable, as he hath miſerably laviſhed away all that ſilver he ſhould have reſerved for his ſoul's health in buttons and loops for his coat."

He alſo wanted diſcretion, but his indiſcretion was a proof of his ſpirit, and of his averſion to meanneſs. He wiſhed to riſe by courts, and expected favours from the miniſter, yet he did not either flatter courts or praiſe miniſters.

"I have

"I have been conſidering," writes Swift to Gay, "why poets have ſuch ill ſucceſs at making their court, ſince they are allowed to be the greateſt and beſt of all flatterers: the defect is, that they flatter only in print or in writing: they will give things under their hand, which they make a conſcience of ſpeaking. Beſides, they are too liberal to haunt anti-chambers, too poor to bribe porters and footmen, and too proud to cringe to ſecond hand favorites in a great family. Tell me, are you not under original ſin by the dedication of your Eclogues to Lord Bolingbroke?—I am an ill judge at this diſtance."

Gay cannot be ſaid to fall under the deſcription of thoſe poets, who, according to Swift, "flatter only in print and writing;" for no one flattered leſs in print than he did. He wrote his Fables by the deſire of Queen Caroline, and yet he paid no compliment to her in any of them; and inſtead of praiſing courts, he ridicules courts and cenſures miniſters. In his Epiſtle to Paul Methuen, he thus ſpeaks with all the dignity of independence, and the ſpirit of a mind which would not debaſe itſelf:

"Why flouriſh'd verſe in great Auguſtus' reign?
He and Mæcenas lov'd the muſe's ſtrain.
But now that wight in poverty muſt mourn,
Who was (O cruel ſtars!) a poet born.

Yet

Yet there are ways for authors to be great;
Write ranc'rous libels to reform the ſtate:
Or, if you chuſe more ſure and ſteady ways,
Spatter a miniſter with fulſome praiſe;
Launch out with freedom, flatter him enough,
Fear not,—all men are dedication proof.
Be bolder yet, you muſt go farther ſtill,
Dip deep in gall thy mercenary quill.
He who his pen in party-quarrels draws,
Liſts an hir'd bravo to ſupport the cauſe;
He muſt indulge his patron's hate and ſpleen,
And ſtab the fame of thoſe he ne'er had ſeen.
Why then ſhould authors mourn their deſp'rate caſe?
Be brave, do this, and then demand a place:
Why art thou poor? Exert the gifts to riſe.
And baniſh tim'rous virtue from thy eyes."

It is greatly to be lamented that a mind thus dignified could not brook diſappointment; and that a loſs of favour which he ſo much affected to deſpiſe, ſhould prey upon his conſtitution, and embitter the comforts of life which ſtill remained in his power. Such is the inconſiſtency of human nature: Gay ſighed for independence, yet would not brook that dependence neceſſary to gain his favourite object; he could inculcate the neceſſity of content in the ſtrongeſt terms and moſt beautiful manner:

"Think Gay, (what ne'er may be the caſe)
Should Fortune take you into grace,

Would

Would that your happineſs augment;
What can ſhe give beyond content? &c.
Is happineſs your point in view?
(I mean th' intrinſic and the true)
She nor in camps or courts reſides,
Nor in the humble cottage hides;
Yet found alike in ev'ry ſphere;
Who finds content will find her there."

Fable 7, l. 26, &c.

Yet, like many a good divine, he did not practiſe what he preached.

But among many ſtrong marks of a firm and feeling mind, he never forgot his obligations to thoſe who had aſſiſted him when he was in indigent circumſtances; and he pays particularly the warmeſt tribute of grateful applauſe to Bolingbroke, Swift, and Pope, when his eulogium of Swift and Bolingbroke ~~muſt do~~ did him diſſervice at court.

Of Swift and Bolingbroke he ſays in his Epiſtle to Pope—

" Ah why, ſweet St. John, cannot I thee find?
St. John for every ſocial virtue priz'd;
Alas! to foreign climates he's confin'd,
Or elſe to ſee thee here I well ſurmis'd."

" Thou too, my Swift, doſt breath Bœotian air,
When wilt thou bring back wit and humour here?"

Of

Of Pope, in his Epiſtle to Bernard Lintott, he ſays ſtill more:

"When Pope's harmonious muſe with pleaſure roves
Amidſt the plains, the murmuring ſtreams and groves,
Attentive Echo, pleas'd to hear his ſongs,
Through the glad ſhade each warbling note prolongs;
His various numbers charm our raviſh'd ears,
His ſteady judgment far outſhoots his years,
And early in the youth the god appears."

Pope, in a letter to Swift, dated October 15, 1725, obſerves of him:—

"Our friend Gay is uſed as the friends of Tories are by Whigs, and generally by Tories too. Becauſe he had humour he was ſuppoſed to have dealt with Dr. Swift, in like manner as when any one had learning formerly, he was ſuppoſed to have dealt with the devil."

Gay ſuffered greatly on account of his friendſhip with Swift, for he was principally on that account ſuſpected of writing ſeveral political papers in oppoſition to government.

Johnſon certainly did not ſufficiently eſtimate the poetical works of Gay, when he ſays, "As a poet, he cannot be rated very high. He was, as I heard a female critic ſay, of a lower order.

He

He had in no degree the mens divinior, or dignity of genius."

Though Gay cannot be claſſed among the higheſt ranks in the Temple of Fame, yet he certainly does not deſerve to be placed in the lower order.

Although he did not attempt to excel in the higher flights of poetry, yet many paſſages in his Poems prove, that he was capable of uniting elevation of ſentiment with correſponding dignity of language.

His chief aim was to pleaſe, rather than to ſurpriſe; and it may be juſtly remarked, that few poets ever wrote with more ſucceſs on a greater variety of ſubjects than Gay;—Tragedy, Comedy, Operas, Fables, Ballads, Moral, Epic, Ruſtic, Town Eclogues, Paſtorals, and Poetical Epiſtles. To this variety he alludes in the motto prefixed to his Poems:

Hic jocamus, ludimus, amamus, dolemus, querimur, iraſcimur, deſcribimus aliquid, modo preſſius modo elatius; atque ipſâ varietate tentamus efficere, ut alia aliis, quædam fortaſſe omnibus placeant.*

Plin. Epiſt.

Next

* We jeſt, ſport, love, weep, complain, are angry; we ſometimes compreſs, at other times dilate the ſubject; and by means of

Next to Pope, perhaps, he is the Engliſh poet who moſt excelled in ſmoothneſs of verſification, correctneſs, felicity of diction, and in the purity of the rhymes; and none ever ſurpaſſed him in expreſſing ſimple thoughts in an appropriate manner.

That he was a moſt excellent claſſical ſcholar, is proved from his works; for no poet ever more frequently or more happily imitated the claſſics. He was no leſs converſant with the Italian poets, whom he imitated with equal felicity.*

As a paſtoral writer, he ſtands unrivalled among the Engliſh poets; and may be conſidered as having, next to Theocritus, adopted the characteriſtic ſimplicity of rural manners. He is not, like Taſſo, under the neceſſity of apologies for making his ſhepherds ſpeak the language of courts;

of this variety we attempt to effect that different parts may pleaſe different perſons, and that ſome things may, perhaps, pleaſe all.

* One inſtance of this imitation of the Italian poets, I ſhall here mention, becauſe I never remember to have ſeen it obſerved.

In his What d'ye Call it, he makes Kitty Carrot ſay—

" Ah why does Nature give us ſo much cauſe,
To make kind-hearted damſels break the laws?

Why

courts; nor does he follow the example of Ambroſe Philips, who almoſt makes his ſhepherds

"As ſilly as their ſheep."

But in thus paying a tribute of applauſe to Gay, as a paſtoral poet, I allude to his Shepherd's Week, for neither the Town Eclogues nor Dione merit ſuch a preference.

As a dramatic writer, Gay principally excelled in low and characteriſtic humour. But he may claim at leaſt the merit of originality, which few writers are entitled to. He invented the Tragi-comic Paſtoral Farce, in the What d'ye Call it; and in the Beggar's Opera, the Ballad Opera, which has ſo long continued to delight the Public:

Why ſhould hard laws kind-hearted laſſes bind,
When too ſoft nature draws us after kind."

Which is evidently a burleſque imitation of a refined, though much admired ſentiment in the Paſtor Fido of Guarini:

"Se'l peccar è sì dolce
E'l non peccar sì neceſſario, o troppo
Imperfetta natura,
Che repugna a la legge;
O troppo dura legge
Che la natura offendi."

Atto Tertzo, Scena Quarta.

As

As a ballad writer, Gay has ſcarcely his equal; as well in the ludicrous as in the pathetic.

The Ballad of *Sweet William's Farewell to Black-eyed Suſan*, in the What d'ye call it, is ſcarcely excelled in the Engliſh language:

" 'Twas when the ſeas were roaring,
With hollow blaſts of wind,
A damſel lay deploring,
All on a rock reclin'd.

Wide o'er the foaming billows
She caſt a wiſtful look;
Her head was crown'd with willows,
That trembled o'er the brook," &c.*

That he poſſeſſed a happy talent for muſical dramas, is in no inſtance ſo fully exempli-

* This ballad was burleſqued, and formed into a ſtate ballad on the Pretender's flight, and ſorrowful lamentation for his late diſappointment in Scotland. In imitation of a new Song, ſung at the Play-houſe, in the comic-tragic Farce, or What d'ye Call it:

" 'Twas when the ſeas were roaring,
With blaſts of Northern wind,
Young Perkin lay deploring,
On warming-pan reclin'd.

Wide o'er the foaming billows
He caſt a diſmal look;
And ſhiver'd like the willows
That tremble o'er the brook,"

fied

fied as in the Serenata of Acis and Galatea. As Handel fortunately compoſed the muſic for this poem, the ſiſter arts are united in an eminent degree; and we may perhaps never again meet with ſo beautiful a paſtoral drama, ſet to muſic by ſo great a maſter.

But as a writer of Fables, Gay ſtands in a pre-eminent ſituation: the difficulty of this ſpecies of compoſition is ſufficiently evident from the ſmall number of writers who have excelled in Fables.

Since the æra of letters to the time of Gay, ſcarcely five authors can be mentioned, who deſerve peculiar notice: Æſop, Phædrus, Pilpay, and Fontaine; and of theſe only Phædrus and Fontaine, wrote in verſe.

The extreme difficulty is atteſted by Gay himſelf, in a letter to Swift:

London, May 6, 1732.

"You ſeemed not to approve of my writing more Fables. Thoſe I am now writing have a prefatory diſcourſe before each of them, by way of epiſtle, and the morals of them moſt are of the political kind, which makes them run into a greater length than thoſe I have already publiſhed. Though this is a kind of writing that

appears

appears very eaſy, I find it the moſt difficult of any that I ever undertook; after I have invented one Fable and finiſhed it, I deſpair of finding out another, but I have a moral or two which I wiſh to write upon."

And again—

Ameſbury, July 24, 1731.

"I have almoſt done every thing I propoſed in the way of Fables; I have not ſet the laſt hand to them. Though they will not amount to half the number, I believe they will make much ſuch another volume as the laſt. I find it the moſt difficult taſk I ever undertook, but have determined to go through with it; and after this, I believe I ſhall never have courage enough to think any more in this way."

Swift himſelf alſo, whoſe verſatility of talents is ſufficiently appreciated, vainly attempted this ſpecies of compoſition; as he confeſſes to Gay:

Dublin, July 10, 1732.

"I am glad you determine upon ſomething; there is no writing I eſteem more than Fables, nor any thing ſo difficult to ſucceed in; which, however, you have done excellently well, and I have often admired your happineſs in ſuch performances, which I have frequently endeavoured at in vain. I remember I acted as you ſeem

ſeem to hint; I found a Moral firſt and ſtudied for a Fable, but could do nothing that pleaſed me, and ſo left off that ſcheme for ever. I remember one, which was to repreſent what ſcoundrels riſe in armies by a long war; wherein I ſuppoſed the Lion engaged, and having loſt all his animals of worth, at laſt Sergeant Hog came to be a Brigadier, and Corporal Aſs a Colonel, &c."

Gay did not undoubtedly poſſeſs either the elegant brevity of Phædrus, or the captivating *naivetè* of La Fontaine; yet he diſplays more originality of invention than even Phædrus or La Fontaine. Their ſtories were moſtly taken from preceding authors; his, with a few exceptions, are entirely his own.

His language is a model for this ſpecies of compoſition; ſeldom above or below the ſubject: it is poetical without being too elevated; and familiar without being low.

Of his Fables may be ſaid, what Gay obſerves of Gulliver's Travels: "From the higheſt to the loweſt this book is univerſally read, from the cabinet council to the nurſery." And to him may be applied what La Harpe ſaid of Fontaine; that "he was at the ſame time the poet of children, and the poet of philoſophers.